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Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

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BEETHOVEN'S

SEVENTH SYMPHONY

BY

GEORGE GROVE, D.C.L.

EDITOR OF "A DICTIONARY OF MUSIC AND MUSICIANS," ETC.



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Felix A. Gendrot
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SYMPHONY, NO. 7, IN F MAJOR (OP. 92).

BEETHOVEN.

Poco sostenuto; Vivace.

Allegretto.

Presto; Presto meno assai.

Finale: Allegro con brio.

AMONG Beethoven's eight Symphonies—for the Ninth stands on a different pedestal, and soars into a higher heaven than any of the others—there are some which seem to occur more readily to the mind when the words "Symphony" and "Beethoven" are named. By their size, if by nothing else, the Eroica and the No. 7 acquire a kind of pre-eminence, and the hearing of them is always an event; while the C minor has an abrupt force and originality about its opening, and a gorgeous splendor and keen sentiment in its last movements, which lift it as high as either of the two just named. It is a rare thing for Beethoven to mention his compositions in terms either of praise or blame, but he has made an exception in favor of the Seventh Symphony. He names it on two occasions, first in a letter to Salomon as "the Grand Symphony in A, one of my very best,"

and again in an English letter to Neate, in London, in which occur the words, "among my best works, which I can boldly say of the Symphony in A."

A considerable interval had occurred since the completion of the Pastoral Symphony, No. 6 in the list. It was finished in 1807, and four years passed before he gave birth to another, however many he may have contemplated and made notes for in the interval. Of the circumstances which led, or may have led, to its peculiar form and coloring, we know nothing. M. Berlioz, with all his devotion to the great master, and keen appreciation of his power and beauties, not always the safest guide, would have us believe that the first movement is a Rustic Wedding, and therefore, we are to suppose, drawn from the same scenes of village mirth that suggested the dance in the Pastoral Symphony. But why run after such a will-o'-the-wisp? Beethoven has granted us no indication of his meaning; and we will not seek one, but will enjoy the splendid music that he has provided, and the images that it raises in our imagination, without preoccupation or restraint.

All that we know of the history of the work is that it was written in the early part of the year 1812; the original manuscript, in the possession of the Mendelssohn family, bearing the autograph date "13th May." It remained for a year and a half in manuscript, and was first performed in the large hall

of the University in Vienna, on the 8th December, 1813, at a concert undertaken by Mälzel for the benefit of the soldiers wounded at the battle of Hanau, where the Austrian and Bavarian armies endeavored to cut off Napoleon's retreat from Leipzig. Much enthusiasm was felt in Vienna on the subject of the concert, and every one was eager to lend a helping hand. The programme consisted of three numbers: the Symphony in A, described as "entirely new"; two Marches performed by Mälzel's mechanical trumpet, with full orchestral accompaniment; and a second grand instrumental composition by "Herr van Beethoven," the so-called "Battle of Vittoria" (op. 91). Beethoven conducted the performance in person, hardly, perhaps, to its advantage, as he was at that time very deaf, and heard what was going on around him only with great difficulty. The orchestra presented an unusual appearance, many of the desks being tenanted by the most famous musicians and composers of the day. Haydn was gone to his rest; but Romberg, Spohr, Mayseder, and Dragonetti were present, and played among the rank and file of the Strings; Hummel and Meyerbeer (of whom Beethoven complained that he always came in after the beat) had the Drums; and Moscheles, then a youth of nineteen, the Cymbals. Even Beethoven's old teacher, Kapellmeister Salieri, was there, "giving the time to the drums and salvos." There was a

black-haired, sallow, thick-set, short-sighted lad of fifteen in Vienna at that time, named Franz Schubert, son of a parish schoolmaster in the suburbs, and himself but just out of school, who had finished his own first Symphony only six weeks before; and we may depend upon it that he was somewhere in the room, though at that time too shy or too insignificant to take a part, or be mentioned in any of the accounts. The performance, says Spohr, was "quite masterly," the new works were both received with enthusiasm, the slow movement of the Symphony was encored, and the success of the concert extraordinary. Beethoven was so much gratified as to write a letter of thanks to all the performers. The concert was repeated on the 12th December, with equal success, including the encore of the *Allegretto*; and the Symphony was played again on the 2d of January, as well as on the 27th of February, when it was accompanied by its twin brother, No. 8 (op. 93, dated October, 1812). The two were published together in December, 1816.

It was the good fortune of a young Austrian named Glöggl, afterward an eminent publisher, to accompany Beethoven from his house to the concert room, on the occasion of the second performance; and we are able, through his account, to catch a glimpse of the composer in somewhat novel circumstances. Glöggl had made his acquaintance some

time before, and had been admitted to the rehearsals and had witnessed a little scene between the fiddlers and the great master. A passage in the Symphony was too much for them, and, after two or three attempts, they stopped, and were bold enough to say that what could not be played should not be written. Beethoven, wonderful to relate, kept his temper, and, with unusual forbearance, "begged the gentlemen to take their parts home with them," promising that, with a little practice, the passage would go well enough. He was right. At the next rehearsal, it went perfectly, and a good deal of laughing and complimenting took place. But to return to our young Austrian. The tickets for the second performance were all sold; and Glöggl would have been shut out, if Beethoven had not told him to call at his lodgings at half-past ten in the morning. They got into a carriage together, with the scores of the Symphony and the "Battle of Vittoria"; but nothing was said on the road, Beethoven being quite absorbed in what was coming, and showing where his thoughts were by now and then beating time with his hand. Schumann* thought that Weber would probably be easier to talk to than Beethoven, and no doubt he had his unapproachable moments. Arrived at the hall, Glöggl was ordered to take the scores under his arm and follow; and thus he passed in, found a place

* *Gesammelte Schriften*, i., 203.

somewhere, and heard the whole concert without difficulty.*

This is the only one of his nine Symphonies for which Beethoven chose the key of A; indeed, it is his only great orchestral work in that key. Mozart, too, would seem to have avoided this key for orchestral compositions; out of his forty-nine Symphonies, only two being in A; and of his twenty-three Overtures, only one, the "Oca del Cairo." Of nine Symphonies of Schubert and five of Schumann (including the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale), not one is in this key. But, on the other hand, of Mendelssohn's five published Symphonies, one, the Scotch, is in A minor; another, the Italian, in A major. Beethoven had his idiosyncrasies on the subject of keys. B minor he calls a "black key" (*schwarze Tonart*); and he wrote to his Scotch publisher, who had sent him an air marked "*Amoroso*," in four flats, to say that the key of four flats should rather be marked *Barbaresco*, and that he had altered the signature accordingly.

In form, the Seventh Symphony varies in no essential respect from the accepted model. In the *Scherzo* alone is there any variation of moment; namely, the repetition of the *Trio*, which is played twice, instead

*This is one of the many new anecdotes in the third volume of Thayer's excellent Life of Beethoven.

of once, as usual,—an innovation which, by the way, Beethoven had already made in his No. 4, in B-flat, and which increases the length of the movement to nearly double what it would have been under the original plan. Here, and in the Eighth, the sister Symphony now before us, has Beethoven substituted an *Allegretto* for the usual *Andante* or *Larghetto*; but, beyond the name, the two *Allegrettos* have no likeness whatever. It is not in any innovation on form or on precedent of arrangement that the greatness of the Seventh Symphony consists, but in the originality, vivacity, power, and beauty of the thoughts, and in a certain romantic character of sudden and unexpected transition which pervades it, and which would as fairly entitle it to be called the Romantic Symphony as its companions are to be called the Heroic and the Pastoral, if only Beethoven had so indicated it, which he has not.

This noble work opens with an introduction, *Poco sostenuto*, far surpassing in dimensions, as well as in breadth and grandeur of style, those of the First, Second, and even Fourth Symphonies, the only others of the immortal nine which exhibit that feature. This introduction is a wonderfully grand, impressive movement, and may be compared to a vast and stately portico or hall, leading to the great galleries, corridors, and apartments of a magnificent palace.

What a splendid development does this noble and varied structure present, of the few bars of prelude with which Haydn introduces the first movements of his greatest Symphonies, or which Beethoven himself prefixed to his First! The introduction starts with a short chord of A from the full orchestra, which lets drop, as it were, a melodious phrase in the First Oboe, imitated successively in the Clarinet, Horn, and Bassoon:—

poco sostenuto.

No. 1.

The musical score is written on two staves. The top staff includes parts for Strings, Oboe, and Clarinet. The bottom staff includes parts for Horn (Cor.) and Bassoon (Fag.). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music begins with a short chord of A from the full orchestra, followed by a melodious phrase in the First Oboe, which is then imitated successively by the Clarinet, Horn, and Bassoon. The tempo marking is *poco sostenuto*.

This, after eight bars (by which time it has for a moment entered the remote key of F major), is interrupted and accompanied by a new feature,—scales of two octaves in length, like gigantic stairs, as some one has called them, and alternating with the phrase in minims:—

No. 2.

Strings.
dim. *pp*
Clar.
&c.

This musical score for No. 2 consists of two staves. The top staff is for Strings, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It begins with a *dim. pp* marking and features a series of ascending sixteenth-note runs. The bottom staff is for Clarinets, also in treble clef with two sharps, and includes a *Clar.* label and an *&c.* ending. The music is written in a style typical of 19th-century orchestral scores.

This conducts to a third entirely new subject, in the key of C major, given out by the Flutes, Oboes, and Bassoons, thus:—

No. 3.

Oboe.
p dolce.
&c.

The musical score for No. 3 consists of two staves. The top staff is for Oboe, in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with an *Oboe.* label and a *p dolce.* marking. The bottom staff is for Bassoons, also in treble clef with one sharp, and includes an *&c.* ending. The music features a graceful descending arpeggio in the Oboe part.

The dignity, originality, and grace of this third theme, especially when repeated *pianissimo* by the Fiddles, with a graceful descending *arpeggio* to introduce it, and a delicious accompaniment in the Oboes and Bassoons, as thus:—

pp Ob. & Fag.
Violin.
No. 3a.
2nd Violin, Vces.
Bass.
&c.

This musical score for No. 3a consists of two staves. The top staff is for Oboe and Bassoon, in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp, and includes a *pp* marking and a *Violin.* label. The bottom staff is for 2nd Violin, Voices, and Bass, in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, and includes a *Bass.* label and an *&c.* ending. The music is written in a style typical of 19th-century orchestral scores.

—are quite wonderful. Beethoven gets back out of the key of C by one of those sudden changes which are so characteristic of this Symphony, and the scales (No. 2) begin again in the treble and bass alternately. They land us in F, in which the third subject (No. 3) is repeated by both Wind and Strings; and then, by another new phrase, the original key is regained:—

No. 4.

The musical score for No. 4 is presented in two systems. The first system features a piano introduction with a crescendo (cres.) leading to fortissimo (ff). The second system shows the entry of the Wind and Strings, with the Wind playing a melodic line and the Strings playing a rhythmic accompaniment. The dynamic is marked fp (fortissimo piano). The score ends with a repeat sign (&c.).

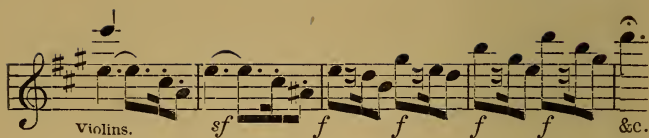
and the Introduction ends.

The transition from the introduction to the first movement proper, the *Vivace*, by an E sixty-one times repeated, and echoed backwards and forwards between the Flutes and Oboes and the Violins, mixed with groups of semi-quavers, for which the last quotation has prepared us,—a passage now lis-

tened for with delight as one of the most characteristic in the whole work,—was for a long time a great stumbling-block to the reception of the Symphony both in London and Paris. The *Vivace* itself, into which the passage just alluded to leads, is a movement of wonderful fire and audacity. The principal theme, in its character, and in the frequent employment of the Oboe, has a quasi-rustic air; but there is nothing rustic about the way in which it is treated and developed: on the contrary, it is not surpassed in dignity, variety, and richness by any of Beethoven's first movements. It is thus given out by the Flute:—

Flutes. *p*

No. 5.



It is both difficult and presumptuous for any one to compare masterpieces so full of beauty and strength, and differing so completely in their character, as do the nine Symphonies of Beethoven; but if any one quality may be said to distinguish that now before us, where all its qualities are so great, it is perhaps, as has already been hinted, that it is the most *romantic* of the nine, by which is meant that it is full of swift, unexpected changes and contrasts which excite the imagination in the highest degree, and whirl it suddenly into new and strange regions. There are some places in this *Vivace* where a sudden change occurs from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*, which have an effect unknown elsewhere. A sudden hush from *ff* to *pp*, in the full hurry and swing of a movement, is a favorite device of Beethoven's, and is always highly effective; but here the change from loud to soft is accompanied by a simultaneous change in harmony, or by an interruption of the figure, or a bold leap from the top to the bottom of the scale, producing the most surprising and irresistible effect. Two of the passages referred to may be instanced:—

No. 6.

Strings.

ff *pp* &c.

No. 7.

ff

In the second example, the resolution of the harmony (the F-sharp and E in the Violins on the F-natural) is an invention of Beethoven's, and adds greatly to the effect of the plunge through two octaves, and the sudden hush in the *tremolando*. A similar effect will occur to most hearers, in the Third Overture to *Leonora* (a work which surely deserves the epithet of "romantic" as truly as anything in music), near the beginning of the *Allegro*, a sudden transition from C major to F-sharp major, accompanied with a change from loud to soft. But, indeed,

this *Vivace* is full of these sudden effects,—especially its second portion,—and they give it a distinct character from the opening movements of any of the other Symphonies.

What can be more arresting, for instance, than the way in which, at the beginning of the second half of the movement, after a loud, rough ascent of all the Strings in unison, *fortissimo*, enforced by all the Wind in the intervals, also *fortissimo*, and on a strong discord, and accented in the most marked manner by two pauses of two bars each, as if every expedient to produce roughness had been adopted, the First Violins begin whispering *pianissimo* in the remote key of C major, and the Bases, four bars later, continue the whisper with a mystic dance, all soft and weird and truly romantic?

We quote a few bars as a guide to the place:—

No. 8. Wind.

1st Violins.

ff Strings.

ppp sempre.

Viol. 2.

Fag.

ppp8velower.



Another example of the same arresting, romantic effect is the sudden change from the key of C-sharp to that of E-flat, earlier in the movement :—

No. 9. Strings. Flute.

with the no less sudden escape into E-natural.

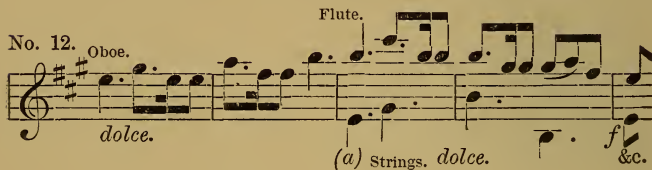
Another is the very characteristic passage of the Violins, with which the second subject is emphasized, like a blow into which Beethoven has put all his strength :—

No. 10.

The second subject itself, in the course of which the passage just quoted occurs, begins as follows :—



and (recurring to the former rhythm) proceeds :—

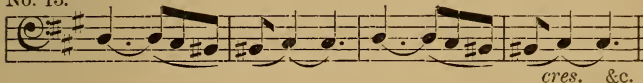


—stamping itself effectually on the memory by the passage quoted as No. 10, and by the broad, massive phrase (a) in which the subject itself is accompanied by the whole of the Strings in unison.

The rhythm is marked as strongly as possible throughout the movement, and there is hardly a bar which does not contain its two groups of dotted triplet quavers, varied and treated in the most astonishingly free and bold manner. When Beethoven does once abandon it, in the *Coda* at the close of the movement, it is to introduce the celebrated passage which at one time excited the wrath and laughter of the best of his contemporaries, though now univer-

sally regarded as perfectly effective, characteristic, and appropriate. In this passage, the Violas and Bases repeat the following figure for twenty-two bars :—

No. 13.



increasing in force throughout from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, against a “pedal point” on E in the rest of the orchestra, three octaves deep from the Bassoons to the high notes of the Flute. It was for this that Carl Maria von Weber is said to have pronounced him “fit for a mad-house.” Such mistakes are even the best instructed and most genial critics open to!

Not less strongly marked or less persistent than the *Vivace* is the march of the *Allegretto*, which is all built upon the following incessant rhythm :—

No. 14.



or, to use the terms of metre, a dactyl and a spondee. Here, again, there is hardly a bar in the movement in which the perpetual stroke of the rhythm is

not heard; and yet the feeling of monotony never intrudes itself. Here is the opening:—

No. 15.

Wind.

Strings.

&c.

The movement is full of melancholy beauties: the vague, soft chord in the Wind instruments with which it begins and ends (a chord of the 6-4, if one must be technical for a moment); the incessant beat of the rhythmical subject just spoken of; the lovely second melody:—

No. 16.

Cello.

&c.

a chain of notes linked in closest succession, like a string of beauties hand-in-hand, each afraid to let go her hold on her neighbors; beginning in the Violas as a mere subordinate accompaniment, but becoming after a while the principal tune of the orchestra. More striking still, perhaps, is the passage where the Clarinets come in with a fresh melody, the key changing at the same time from A minor to A major, and the effect being exactly like a sudden gleam of sunshine:—

No. 17. Clar.



One of the interests of this passage is that it may have suggested a similar beautiful change (in the same key) in the *Andante con moto* of Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony. At any rate, Beethoven himself anticipated the change in the *Intermezzo* of the Funeral March in the *Eroica*, where the Oboe preaches hope and peace as touchingly as the Clarinet does

here, with a similar change of mode, too, and a similar accompaniment in the Strings. Even this short relief, however (but thirty-seven bars), does not appear to please the composer: he seems even to push it away from him with an absolute gesture of impatience,—

No. 18.



almost as if we heard him say the words, "I won't have it,"—and returns to the key of A minor, and to the former melody (No. 16), given in three octaves by the Flute, Oboe, and Bassoon, with a semi-quaver accompaniment in the Strings. During this, as well as during the truly heavenly melody which we have been describing and quoting (No. 17), the Bass, with a kind of "grim repose," keeps up inexorably the rhythm,—

No. 19.



—with which the movement started, and maintains it even through the *fugato* which so effectively continues the latter half of the movement,

No. 20.

Viol. 2.



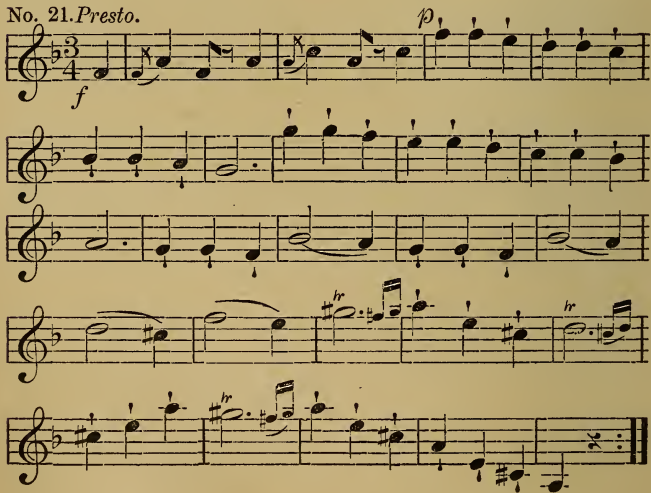
as strictly as if its composer had been not Beethoven, but some mediæval maker of "canons," to whom structure was everything, and fancy nothing. No wonder that this *Allegretto* was encored at the first performance of the Symphony, or that it was for long one of the few of Beethoven's movements that could be endured in Paris "En parlant de Beethoven en France," says Berlioz, "on dit *l'Orage* de la Symphonie Pastorale, le *Final* de la Symphonie en *ut mineur*, *l'Andante* de la Symphonie en *la*." Very good for those early days, but the Concerts Populaires are fast curing the Parisians of such absurdities.

It may be well to state, on the authority of

Schindler and Nottebohm, that this movement was originally entitled *Andante*, but was altered in the MS. parts to *Allegretto*, which also appears in the printed orchestral parts (not published till March, 1816), and that Beethoven, urged by the frequent misunderstandings caused by the new title, desired at a later time that the original *Andante* should be resumed.

The third movement, *Presto*, with its subsidiary *Presto meno assai* (not entitled *Scherzo* and *Trio*, though they are so in effect), is no less original, spirited, and *entrainant* than the two which have preceded it. It opens as follows:—

No. 21. *Presto*.



in the key of F; but, before the first fifteen bars are well over, it is in A, in which unusually remote key the first division ends. Out of this region, Beethoven escapes by a daring device:—

No. 22. Strings.



which brings him at a blow into C, and pleases him so much that he immediately repeats the operation in the new key, and so gets into B-flat. The whole of this *Scherzo* is a marvellous example of the grace and lightness which may be made to play over a substratum of enormous strength, and also of Beethoven's audacity in repeating his phrases and subjects.

The *Trio*—*Presto meno assai* (slightly slower)—is an absolute contrast to the *Scherzo* in every respect. It is one of those movements, like the *Andante* in the G major piano-forte Concerto of the same composer, which are absolutely original, were done by no one before, and have been done by no one since. It begins with a melody (which it is difficult to be-

lieve was not floating in Schubert's mind when he wrote the first phrase of his *Fantaisie-Sonata* in G (for piano-forte solo) in the Clarinets, accompanied as a Bass by the Horns and Bassoons, and also by a long holding A in the Violins. Of this, we quote an outline of the first portion :—

No. 23. Viol. 1.

Clar.

&c.

This melody, which we now know on the perfectly trustworthy authority of the Abbé Stadler to have been a pilgrims' hymn in common use in Lower Austria, is repeated by the Oboes, with a similar accompaniment.

The second portion of the *Trio* is in keeping with the first: the long holding A is maintained, but the Horn has a more marked part than before, gradually increasing in oddness and prominence till it brings back the first portion of the tune, this time in the full band. The return from this (key of D) to the *Scherzo* (key of F) is as affecting and "romantic" a point as can be found in the whole Symphony. The

extension given to this movement by the double repetition of the *Trio* has already been spoken of.

The *Finale* is not less full of fiery genius, caprice, and effect than the other movements, nor is it less characteristic of its author, though it contains fewer of those sudden "romantic" changes which (as we have very imperfectly attempted to show) distinguish the earlier portions of the work. It reflects less of the sentiment, and more of the prodigious force and energy, and the grim, rough, humorous aspect of Beethoven, abrupt and harsh in his outward manner and speech. In the preceding movements, this outward harshness less rarely appears. Force and vigor they exhibit in every bar, but it is rather the general nature of the man,—that well-spring of loveliness and grace which lay deep beneath his exterior, his splendid and varied imagination, his command of beauty, and his sense of awe and mystery that distinguish the *Allegro*, *Allegretto*, and *Scherzo*. In the *Finale*, however, his more obvious external characteristics have their sway. "Beethoven," says Spohr, "was often a little hard, not to say *raw*, in his ways; but he carried a kindly eye under his bushy eyebrows." It is this side of his character which appears to be reflected in the *Finale*. It begins with four bars of loud chords from the orchestra (of which much use is made subsequently), followed by the

strange, somewhat furious, and at first hearing not attractive subject:—

No. 24. *Allegro con brio.*



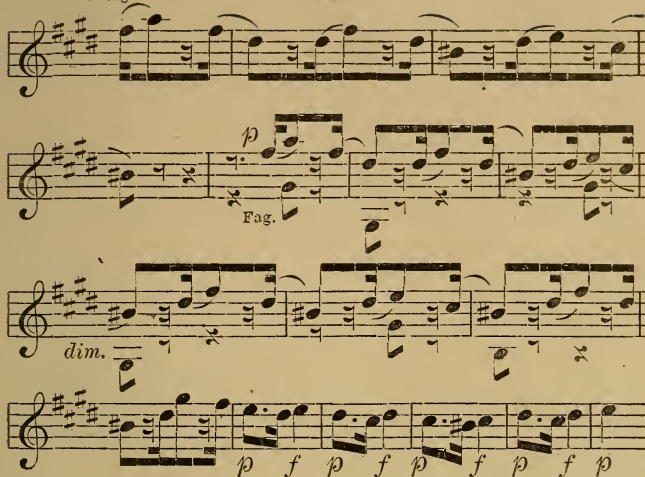
Then, after a reference back to the initial four bars of the movement, a new subject appears, as harsh and uncompromising as that already quoted, and leading into a modification of it:—

No. 25.

Viol. 2. Viol. 8ve lower. &c.

This is continued in a series of phrases of dotted quavers, all hard and harsh, ending in C-sharp minor, in which key the “second subject” proper appears, full of vigor and elasticity:—

No. 26. Strings.



Notice the humorous octaves in the Bassoon, and the force obtained by throwing the accent on to the latter half of the bar in the last four measures of the quotation. In this rhythm there is some charming capricious work, from top to bottom of the scale among the Strings, after which the first half of the *Finale* ends. The movement is in the ordinary symphonic form. The first portion is repeated, and then the working out commences. And here the wild humor and fun distance anything that has gone before. The abrupt transitions and sudden vagaries, like rough jokes and loud peals of laughter,—founded

on the phrase marked (a) in quotation No. 24,—are irresistible, and bring Beethoven before us in his most playful, unconstrained, or, as he himself used to phrase it, “unbuttoned” state of mind :—

No. 27.

The musical score for No. 27 consists of four systems, each with a piano (piano) and violin (violin) staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'.

- System 1:** The piano part features a series of eighth-note chords, each marked with a forte accent (*sf*). The violin part has a single eighth note.
- System 2:** The piano part continues with eighth-note chords, marked with *sf*. The violin part has a single eighth note.
- System 3:** The piano part continues with eighth-note chords, marked with *sf*. The violin part has a single eighth note.
- System 4:** The piano part continues with eighth-note chords, marked with *sf*. The violin part has a single eighth note.

The score concludes with the notation "&c." in the final measure of the piano part.

A somewhat similar picture will be recollected in the *Coda* of the *Finale* to the Eighth Symphony. In each of these, one feels one's self, as it were, buffeted from side to side, with no more power of resistance than a baby in the hands of a giant. And this humor pervades the greater part of the movement, till the conclusion is approached, when, during a long *Coda*, the great master lays aside his animal spirits and rough jokes, and surrenders himself to graver and more solemn impressions, graver even than those which inspired him during the conclusion of the first movement of this noble Symphony, in connection with which we have already referred to the passage we are now considering. This is, like that, a moving pedal, on E, alternating with D-sharp, and lasting for more than twenty bars. During the whole of these, and the preceding passage of equal length, where the Bass settles down semitone by semitone, till it reaches the low E, the Strings are occupied by imitations and repetitions of the original figure (No. 24), and the Wind by long holding notes, the whole forming a passage of unrivalled pathos, nobility, and interest.

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